

## Hidden in Plain Sight by ladyvady

**Series:** [Hidden \[1\]](#)

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence, Angst, Canon-Typical Violence, Child Abuse, Eventual Relationships, Eventual Romance, F/M, Fluff, Hurt/Comfort, I love Steve so I'm writing about him, M/M, Medical Experimentation, Memory Alteration, Other Additional Tags to Be Added, Past Child Abuse, Period-Typical Homophobia, Pre-Slash, Slash, Slow Build, Tags Are Hard, eventually

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Billy Hargrove, Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Jim "Chief" Hopper, Joyce Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Original Characters, Steve Harrington, Will Byers

**Relationships:** Jonathan Byers/Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington/Billy Hargrove, Steve Harrington/Nancy Wheeler

**Status:** In-Progress

**Published:** 2017-12-04

**Updated:** 2017-12-18

**Packaged:** 2022-04-03 14:49:59

**Rating:** Not Rated

**Warnings:** Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

**Chapters:** 3

**Words:** 5,477

**Publisher:** [archiveofourown.org](https://archiveofourown.org)

**Summary:**

Eleven wasn't the only child the lab experimented on; there were more. One of them has been hiding in plain sight in Hawkins.

# 1. Seven

## Author's Note:

Not the most original title, but considering the direction I'm taking, it fits. I've been thinking on this idea for a couple weeks, and finally decided to start writing it to see if anyone might like the story idea. Also, time will skip fast at some points, especially during this first chapter (and probably the next 2-3 chapters), as other times spent in the lab may be used as flashbacks.

Let me know if what I've tagged is enough, or if I need to add more (or any other comments, constructive critiques, etc).

I am my own beta, so all mistakes are my own. Please point out any mistakes, and I'll correct them. I also do not own Stranger Things, or it's characters. The story and original characters are my own.

October, 1968

Dr. Evans entered the observation room, clipboard in hand, and with a sense of giddiness he hadn't felt in quite some time. He walks up to the nurse already watching the occupants of the room on the other side of the mirror and writing down what he assumes is information on their newest acquisition.

"How is our newest asset doing?"

*"The child has been in almost a constant state of anxiousness to what appears to be panic or hysteria. A pattern has been noted that he calms down, somewhat, when fewer personnel are near or limited activity is occurring in the room."*

*Ignoring her obvious dislike of him, he simply states "Interesting. Exactly why does Dr. Brenner believe this child (making a point of emphasizing the word, and barely containing an eye roll) belongs here at the lab? It's what? Three years old? It hardly looks special to me."*

*"The child is just turning two years old, and it's hardly either one of our places to judge what Dr. Brenner decides must be done. And the baby is special, as far as we've been able to determine, he's capable of effecting the feelings of others; although, only in a limited capacity. We are unsure of his parentage, to determine where these abilities may have come from."*

*"Fascinating. So a sort of empathic ability then? Might be the explanation for such volatile emotional responses; perhaps overstimulated. Should prove quite remarkable, we don't have one of those yet. Are we sure this is actually a possibility? Dr. Brenner has been mistaken before."*

*"Yes, with most of those who interact with him, the child has an effect on their emotions, for a limited amount of time or the feelings stop when the person leaves the room. Dr. Brenner plans to test this theory more, by sending in person's in various states of emotion. As you mentioned, he also thinks the child may feel their emotions as well, and depending on how strong they are, the emotions felt effect the child's state of being."*

*"Is it capable of speech yet?"*

*"Yes, he is well spoken, for a two year old; when he chooses to speak. The family social services had placed him with were quite taken with the boy, despite his emotional issues and worked with him to pass many of the child's age milestones."*

*"I suppose that would make some things easier. How are his comprehension skills?"*

*"Those are higher than his verbal skills, and although he doesn't wish to be here or follow directions, he understands what we are saying. Albeit, we are not asking or saying anything truly above his projected age level of understanding."*

*"Excellent, let's get to it then, shall we?"*

*January, 1969*

*"No."*

*"Now Seven, we've discussed this before, you must do all the tests before you may go back to your room. The sooner you finish..."*

*"No."*

*"Seven, you know what happens when you refuse to do your testing, and it will also upset your Papa. You wouldn't want that, would you?"*

*"Don't wanna. Hurts."*

*"I know, but this is important, and the sooner we finish, the sooner it's over."*

*"Papa happy?"*

*"Yes, this will make Papa happy."*

*"Okay."*

*March, 1969*

*"His progress is remarkable, Dr. Evans."*

*"Yes, Dr. Brenner, I agree. The asset appears to have adjusted to being here at the lab adequately, and we've had less outbursts. We did have to limit those who come into contact with him, his emotional stability is still too easily influenced when interacting with individuals he is not used to being around often. I project we may be able to expand contact in a few months."*

*"Excellent. Though, let's hold off on that, and perhaps explore how he interacts with animals; maybe a domesticated rat or a hamster. I want to start small. I think there's some interesting potential here, should we push him just the right way."*

*"Of course, sir, we'll integrate this into his developmental plan."*

*"Good, and now I suppose I better pay the boy a visit, he does miss his Papa so."*

*October, 1969*

*"No, no...please, no. I'll be good, don't make me go."*

*"Enough Seven, you know the punishment for misbehavior."*

*"I'm sorry. I won't be bad anymore."*

*"You've already disappointed me, and your Papa. You knew this was important, and you choose to not follow directions anyway."*

*"But I don't like it, makes me feel bad."*

*"You know you're special, Seven, and if you learn to use your gifts you may be able to help a lot of people. So when you refuse to do as you're told, you're setting everything back. Some time spent in the thinking room will help you find your focus again."*

*"But I'm sorry."*

*"I realize this, Seven, but I have to follow the rules too."*

*"Okay, Dr. Eh-wans."*

*"Good boy, use this time to practice the meditation Nurse Elliott discussed with you."*

*"I'll try."*

*"Alright, I'll be back for you when your time is up."*

*After locking the door to the isolation room specifically designed with Seven in mind, Dr. Evans returned to the lab where Nurse Elliott was completing the day's report.*

*"I'm unsure as to whether or not that room is the correct course to take with Seven. Blocking him away from any interactions, especially emotional, always sets him back."*

*"Yes, well, nurse, we don't make the rules here, nurse; however, it is our job to follow them. I'm sure Dr. Brenner would be more than willing to find another to take your place, if you're unwilling to do it."*

*Throwing her pen on the table, and standing up, Maggie Elliott turns to fully face Dr. Evans. "You're a real asshole, you know that?" She then proceeds to leave the lab.*

October, 1974

*"Are you able to get the animals to do what you want?"*

*"That's not how it works."*

*"Seven, that's not what I asked you. Answer my question."*

*"I told you before, I can't talk to them. I can't tell them to do anything. Same as people."*

*"It's like you're trying to upset me on purpose."*

*"I'm not! You never listen to me. I can't boss them around."*

*"I'm not asking you to boss them around. I know you've gotten both the cats and rats to follow your directions before, so don't act like you don't know what I'm asking you about!"*

*"I don't like this new building. There's something wrong here."*

*"Stop trying to change the subject. Answer the question, I've had enough of your insolence!"*

*"I'm not being ins...insolent! The cats liked me when I pet them, and that's why they came to me. I didn't make them come to me. That's how it is with all the animals, I was just nice! (muttering) Maybe you should be nicer."*

*"Nicer?! I'll show you..."*

*"Dr. Evans?"*

*"What nurse?!"*

*"Perhaps you should take a break and leave the room for a bit, you're both getting, uh, a little worked up."*

*Dr. Evans has grown to dislike Nurse Elliott greatly, but she may have a point.*

*"Fine." He turns to Seven, "You may wish to think hard on the answers*

*you give me when I come back.”*

*Nurse Elliott watches as Seven moves to a corner in the room, sitting down and huddling in on himself, but as upset as he was getting, she notices a significant amount of his tension leaves his body as soon as Dr. Evans leaves the room. She turns to Dr. Evans when he enters the room.*

*“I think you and him were feeding off each other’s emotions, or more specifically, the more upset you got, the more upset he got, and it was beginning to cycle.”*

*“He’s never effected my emotions before.”*

*Maggie wants to roll her eyes. “I’m pretty sure we’ve all been effected at some point or another. He’s not as strong as Dr. Brenner thinks he’ll become, but he’s progressed a lot.”*

*“Yes, well, he’s only effected more weak-minded individuals so far, but what you say may have some merit, I suppose, since he’s gotten marginally stronger in his abilities.”*

*This time Maggie turns back to the observation mirror, looking in on Seven, so that Dr. Evans doesn’t see her eye roll. Wouldn’t do to piss off Mr. Perfect even more than he already was.*

*Walking up to the mirror, Dr. Evans stares at Seven.*

*“I think he may need some time in his isolation room. Dr. Brenner has been occupied by some of the other assets, but he plans on checking on our progress soon.”*

*“Don’t you think you use that room a little too much? I’ve told you before that it sets his progress back. He hates it, and it takes weeks to get him to speak again.”*

*“I didn’t ask your opinion, nurse, and he doesn’t need to speak to use his abilities. Dr. Brenner has plans. I know he has a deprivation tank being built, perhaps I’ll be able to use that in Seven’s training as well.”*

*Maggie is just able to bite her tongue, and keeps from telling Dr. Evans where he can shove it. Looking at Seven again she thinks, perhaps it’s time to connect with her outside source.*

*March, 1975*

*"Papa?" Seven is looking around the hallway, confused as to what his Papa wants him to do. He's walked down a lot of the hallways at the lab, but usually it's Dr. Evans or Nurse Maggie (he can call her that in his head) that take him anywhere. Papa comes to see him in the lab and his bedroom, and sometimes "the room" after he's spent time in there for misbehaving.*

*"We have something new we want to try, Seven. I know you want to do good for me, for what we're doing here, so I expect you to behave."*

*"Okay, Papa." Seven is confused, but knows better than to question his Papa further. Last time everyone got so angry, and it hurt and scared him.*

*When they reach their destination, Dr. Brenner instructs the boy toward a large tank of water. He doesn't bother explaining what it's called to Seven, and simply tells him that they are going to have him go underwater, to block out everything. He won't be able to hear or see anything outside of the tank. As they are getting him ready, Dr. Brenner explains what he wants Seven to do.*

*"While you're in the water, I want you to concentrate on your emotions, and then once you do that, I'll instruct you from there."*

*"Okay, and this will make you happy, Papa?"*

*"Yes, it will. I'll be very proud of you."*

*"Okay, I'll try hard."*

*"Alright, once they put this (he points to metal thing) over your head, you'll go down the ladder into the water. I'll be able to talk to you while you're down there. Ready?"*

*Seven shakes his head in an okaying motion.*

*That's the last thing Seven remembers upon waking up on his bed. No matter how hard he tries, he can't remember anything that happened in the water tank. From the look Nurse Maggie gives him when she comes in to check on him, he probably doesn't want to. He hope Dr. Evans doesn't*



put him in the “room” again, because he doesn’t think he made Papa happy.

*Jun, 1975*

“Are you sure want to go through with this?”

“Yes, I...I know I signed up to work for them, but it’s nothing like I thought it would be like. I didn’t know what they would do to these kids. I want to get them all out, but I know that’s not possible. I really only work with one of them, but I know there’s more. Dr. Evans probably knows more, hell, the bastard probably gets off on it. These people are convinced of the righteousness of their “work” and even if I only get one out, it’s better than nothing.”

“You could expose them, tell the world what’s going on.”

“Right, and be dead with no kid saved, while they cover their asses and continue to get away with it. No, I’m just one person, and I’ll probably end up dead anyway, but this way I can help him at least. Did you set up everything?”

“Yeah, new identity, and some adoptive parents who aren’t too interested in where the kid is coming from. The husband just wants an heir, and he’s married to your typical trophy wife, but they’ll look after him. It’s the best I could do, with you wanting him in the location you do. They already live there, and they’re wealthy enough that no one in town will think twice about them adopting a kid. It’ll just be them being eccentric, rich people. I’ve let them know not to announce anything right away and to wait a few months before enrolling him into school or anything.”

“Hawkins is the last place they’ll look, it’s so close to the lab they’ll never think to check, and I have someone to work with him before he goes to the parents. Hopefully, searching for me will distract them enough to get him settled. Despite the trauma, he’s young enough I don’t think integration will be too difficult. I hope. Did you also change his age? I think that will help keep suspicions down some as well.”

“If you say so, and yes, but only older by a few months, but that should at least put him in a grade different than he should be in. Is there anything

*that will lead them back to me?"*

*"No, I made sure."*

*"Alright, here's the papers."*

*Maggie scans through them, sees a birth certificate, adoption papers, and then looks closer, squinting. "Steven? Really?"*

*"Well, like you said, it's close enough to what they called him, so no one will think twice about it."*

*Maggie rolls her eyes, "Fine."*

## 2. Escape and Reeducation

### Notes for the Chapter:

A/N: I have to say, I am overwhelmed with the reaction over this story has had by so many, and ever so appreciative and humbled by the wonderful comments, kudos, and bookmarks I have received. Thank you all very much. It's inspiring to say the least, but I'm now a little wary on whether or not I can live up to expectations, and hope that I do not disappoint.

Chapter Insights: In regard to this chapter, we have an escape and then working on reeducation. I've eluded to what's done with Steven/Steve, memory-wise, but do not go into great detail (and this is fiction, so maybe some suspension of disbelief can be afforded here). The idea is Maggie (who will switch to another name, that she will be called from there on out) gets help with memory alteration in regard to Steven, which mainly involves him forgetting his time at the lab. I think it helps that he's still fairly young, and impressionable, that giving him a new background would work. Additionally, I plan on revisiting things that happen "now" in Steve's life, later in the story, so this won't be the last time it comes up.

End of July, 1975

As Maggie walked the last hallway to Seven's room, she mentally patted herself on the back for spending time getting buddy-buddy with people working in Security. Over the past few months, she'd made the point to learn their patterns and habits, but more importantly, their routes and procedures. It was probably wrong of her, but she'd also left some baked treats that may lead to a lot of bathroom trips for whoever ate them. However, thinking on the children they're helping to keep here, she pushes any guilt she feels to the side, and concentrates on the task at hand.

Knowing that the lab would be installing video surveillance in a couple months also sped up her timetable and preparations; cameras everywhere would make it near impossible to get Seven out. Hopefully, no one picked up on her actions, and the evening would run smoothly. She'd been nervous all week, but now that the day has come, a sort of calm has settled over her as she approaches his room and enters. Seven is sitting in one of corners of the room, cross-legged with his hands in his lap. Maggie feels a pang for how isolated this little boy has been for the last 7 years, and prays she's able to accomplish what she's trying to do for him.

"Nurse Maggie? Do I have to do another test? My head still hurts from this morning."

"No Seven, no testing. In fact, I need you to come with me, we need to go."

"Where are we going, Nurse Maggie?"

"We can't really talk right now, Seven, we've only got a short amount of time to get out of here without anyone knowing. So I need you to be really quiet, okay?"

Seven nods his head yes.

"Good boy. Now let's walk quickly."

With eyes on her watch, Maggie navigates the halls with Seven, and even a few rooms, and as planned, makes it to her car with no one seeing them; can't imagine there'd be no alarm if someone had. It has taken about a month to get her plan in motion, getting everything in place for both Seven's and her escape. She's worried it's been almost too easy, but can't stop to worry about it now.

"Alright, I need you to sit in the back on the floor, with the blanket covering you. I also need you to be quiet and still, until we're far enough away from here. You're doing very well, Seven. I know you're confused on what's going on, but I promise I'm doing what's best for you." She can tell he's scared, and definitely confused. When she thinks about it, as far as he remembers, he's only ever been in the car that brought him here when they transferred operations to Hawkins

Lab, and hasn't left the labs since. The majority of his life has been white walls, tests, and interactions with only adults; Maggie hopes he'll flourish once he's settled with the Harrington's and can be around other children.

Seven looks around the parking lot, feeling a little lost. He can't imagine Papa is going to be happy with him, but he trusts Nurse Maggie, and does as she's told him to do. He can feel she's nervous and maybe scared...but being under the blanket actually calms him down a little; he's used to feeling Maggie, and it's nice not feeling anyone else, but her and himself.

Maggie is on edge the entire drive, including when they'd stop to switch vehicles, to the cabin she's gotten to work with Seven, before he's taken to the Harrington's home. She just hopes the plan to reintegrate him works; there's not really a precedent for this type of situation, and she's relying heavily on the skills of someone who is basically a hypnotist to work Seven's memories into that of his new identity. After pulling up to the cabin, she rests her head on the steering wheel before taking a deep breath and reaching for the car door handle.

"Okay Seven, time to get out."

Seven steps out of the car and scans their surroundings; it's dark, but he can see a lot of trees and a house. He glances up and Maggie, but she's not looking at him, but at the house. He can tell she's nervous, and it's making him feel nervous too. Grabbing on to her hand, he tries to help her feel better. It doesn't help his headache any, but he can tell it helps her some.

"It'll be okay, Nurse Maggie."

Maggie startles a little, noticing Seven holding her hand. She feels a little calmer now, as she looks down at him and squeezes his hand.

"Yes it will, Seven, I promise you."

Mid-August, 1975

Maggie, or as she's now going by, Madeline or Maddie, is outside the cabin smoking a cigarette. She decided Seven, or Steven, as she needs to remember to call him, wasn't the only who needed a new identity. Supposedly, a name similar to hers or at least starting the same would help her to answer to it better. Whatever, Nurse Maggie Elliott is no more, and she's going to have to think hard on what she'll do and where she'll go once Steven is settled.

The last few weeks have been stressful, not because of Steven (well, not completely anyway), but because she's constantly on edge, worrying that any minute they'll be surrounded by government personnel and dragged back. She's cut and dyed her hair to change her appearance, and tried her best to not leave any trails to where they are currently as well as where she'll be taking Steven when they're done at the cabin.

Steven's progress was slow-going at initially, with him not understanding why they were there and doing what they were. In a lot of ways, he's like a sponge; soaking up a lot of knowledge so recently denied him. He's smart, but his lack of any formal education shows, and she's hopeful that he'll absorb enough to prepare him for school. She may recommend a tutor to the Harrington's, and it's probably best that his new birth certificate has him a little younger than he actually is for school purposes.

Bill, who she knew in high school, but hadn't been in touch with for years, until planning this 'escape,' is actually good at what he does. He'd corrected her right away on calling him a hypnotist, and explained (in so much detail) that he was a psychologist who sometimes employed the use of hypnosis in his line of work ("I'm not some carnival sideshow, for god's sake!!"). She wishes he wasn't connected to her at all, but would rather trust someone she knows, then trying to find someone who could help do what she has planned that was a complete stranger. Taking one last drag, she drops the cigarette to the ground, and uses her foot to put it out before walking back inside.

September, 1975

Steven is playing with some squirrels in the yard, tossing small pieces of bread to them as they scurry about fighting for it. Maddie smiles at his giggles, before turning around and looking at Bill. He's been going over his "notes" for about an hour, and putting off any of her questions. She's convinced he's only doing it to annoy her, and from the smirk she swears he's wearing, she's most likely correct. Her eyes bore into him until she finally can't hold back.

"Do you think what we're doing is working?"

"Well, it's not *not* working."

"Don't be a smartass. I'm being serious."

*"That was only half joking, Mads. There's no precedent for what we're doing here, and I'll never be able to say for certain that it's worked 100 percent. He's answering to Steven, he's showing less signs of remember his time at the lab, and I think once he's settled in his new home, it'll fade even more. This all being said, the information isn't erased from his mind, and there will always be a chance he'll remember on his own or be triggered by something."*

*"I realize that's always a possibility, but I'm hoping the more time away from the lab will lessen the possibility. Hawkins is a quiet town, so I can't imagine anything happening that would trigger his memory in any way. He never knew the name of the lab while he was there, so it should be alright that it's relatively close. Ultimately though, there's no real way to replace a seven year blank space of memories, nine, if you count the time before he was found by the doctor's there. The amnesia angle you came up will have to do though, and he'll have to think he was in an accident that caused it."*

*"Like I said, it's not like we have anything to base this off of, and it's really the best I can do. The mind is fragile, especially his. The parent's will just need to be patient and work on getting him settled in his new home. Hope they're up for it."*

*"Me too. I can't tell them about his abilities, but I'll leave them with the means to contact me, should I be able to, if something happens. I'm counting on his not knowing about them as a means to stop him from using them."*

Bill shrugs, "I know this is hard, what you're doing...what we're doing, but you did good getting him out of there, and he's at least got a chance now. We know the worst case scenario is possible, but I think it's better to concentrate on being positive. Besides, if we worry too much, he may realize something is off, and undo all our work. Give it another few weeks, and he should be ready to go to his new home."

"Alright, you're right. I knew this was going to be difficult, and I accepted it as soon as took him. I'll go fetch him for his next session."

October, 1975

"Steven! Are you ready? You've been packing for 30 minutes, and you only have one bag. We need to meet with your adoptive parents in an hour."

"I'm not ready, Aunt Maddie."

Rolling her eyes, Maddie walks to Steven's room. Upon entering, she doesn't see him right away. Looking around, she finally finds in under the bed, so she sits down on it.

"You can't stay under there forever, you know."

"Yes, I can."

"And how exactly do you plan to do that? You'll starve and wet yourself, and neither one of those are fun."

"I have butterscotch pudding and granola bars."

She shakes her head, this kid and his love of pudding.

"That doesn't solve the bathroom issue, and you can't live on pudding alone."

"Yes I can."

"It's going to be okay, Steven. You don't have to worry."

"People will think I'm a weirdo. They are going to hate me."



*She really should not have let him watch TV, but didn't want him to not know what it was. Unfortunately, it taught him things Bill and her hadn't.*

*"No they won't, nobody could hate you."*

*"Uh huh."*

*"The Harrington's are very happy you're coming, Steven. They've wanted a child, and want to provide a good home for you."*

*"I don't want to leave you."*

*"Steven, we discussed this, and you know that I can't. It's not that I don't want to or don't care, but the Harrington's can provide for you in all the ways I can't. You'll be happy, I promise."*

*"Promise?"*

*"I do, and it's okay to be nervous. I'm nervous too."*

*"Really?"*

*"Yes, I want you to be happy and it'll be hard for me not being there to help."*

*Sounding very pouty, "I still don't know why you can't be."*

*Sighing, Maddie rubs her eyes.*

*"Alright Steven, time to get out of there. We can't keep talking in circles."*

*"I'm not standing in a circle."*

*"That's not what I meant." Standing up, "Come along, it's time to go start your new life."*

*Steven crawls out from under the bed, and gives Maddie the most put upon expression she's ever seen. Not even a teenager and he's already dramatic. She holds out her hand.*

*"Let's go."*

*He reaches out and takes it.*

## **Notes for the Chapter:**

And from now on, Maggie will be Madeline or Maddie, as I mentioned above.

### 3. Road to Reintegration

#### Notes for the Chapter:

First, you all of blown me away with your comments, kudos, and bookmarks. It's humbling to know you all are interested in my story, and I hope you continue to be.

In regards to this chapter, I apologize both for the short length and how long it took to get it done (I do plan on making the chapters longer as I go along). I rewrote it a couple times, and reworded it again some more, and I'm still not entirely happy with it. It's kind of a transition/interlude chapter, and necessary, I suppose. I felt like Steven's introduction to the Harrington's needed it's own chapter, which is why I didn't include it in this one.

The next update will most likely be a little bit of a wait again, as I'll be out of town with the family (in the hellscape known as Tennessee), making writing harder to do. I'll try to get ahead on chapters, if possible, and it gives me a great reason to hide away from the in-laws. I just wanted to make sure you all knew that I'm still writing, even if the holiday time posting is slower than I wanted it to be.

Before they leave, Maddie wants to talk; so after they sit at the table, Steven pulls out one of his butterscotch puddings, and starts eating it while swinging his legs and looking at Maddie. She feels nervous to him and so he gives her a bright smile, unaware he's got pudding on the side of his mouth, and therefore doesn't understand the small chuckle and smile she covers quickly with her hand.

Although Maddie's been well aware this time at the cabin would come to an end, she'd become comfortable in the relatively safety and routine of what her and Bill had been doing. If she could, she thinks she might have found a way to stay here for a couple years, but knows that's not really what's feasible or best for Steven. He has

always known they would leave at some point as well, but was not aware of the other news she was about to deliver; that she was going to have remove herself from his life once he left with the Harrington's.

After a lot of deliberation with herself, Maddie had made the decision that it would be best to mostly disappear from Steven's life for the time being. Besides the fact that she wasn't sure if her life expectancy was going to be long, considering the lab was definitely looking for them, she knew a clean break for now would allow him to integrate with his new parents better. She wasn't going too far though, and hadn't lied to him when she told him that she was going back to school. Being a nurse right now wouldn't work, and she still needed to support herself; therefore, she was going to find a school and work a couple 100 miles from Hawkins. It wasn't as though she could go stay with family, and Maddie didn't want to be too far from Steven, just in case. Still, she had hated making that sweet, sticky smile disappear.

Steven made his unhappiness very clear even after finally leaving the cabin, and so she left him to his silence during the drive while she concentrated on driving and watching their surroundings. They had been lucky so far with regard to the lab, but couldn't completely forget the danger they were both in. As long as everything remained clear, she felt fairly comfortable with leaving him in the Harrington's care. Once Steven left with them, she planned on staying in the area, observing from a distant, for the next week or so, just in case. For being so close to the lab, the town of Hawkins seemed pretty quiet and low-key in contrast, and figured it was going to be another little town where nothing happened; exactly what Steven needed. Before leaving, she was going to make sure though.

Steven scratches at the scar on the inside of his left arm that always itches when he's nervous, and apparently when irritated and upset as well. Maddie says he got the scar in the accident; the accident he was in that made him forget so much. It kind of looks like a burn, but since he doesn't remember how he got it, or any of the accident itself let alone his past, he often finds himself touching it or staring at it to try and make himself remember. It never works, and Maddie called it something like a "nervous tick" and he should try to ignore it, but he

hasn't been able to stop doing it yet.

As they drive on, mostly silent, he spends most of his time looking out the window, watching everything go by. Even in his upset, he's amazed by everything, it all looks so new. Steven had no idea how much he forgot after the accident until he was out in the world again, and while it often feels big and scary, it also feels wonderful. Sometimes he thinks he can almost sense the world, like he can touch it, but when he mentions that to Maddie she gets a strange look on her face, so he's stopped saying it. That doesn't mean he's stopped sensing it though, but he's beginning to think he is the only one to feel it (or people) like he does.

Before they'd left the cabin he was happy to be leaving, but when Maddie had sat him at the table while he ate his pudding, and explained that she wouldn't be able to see him for quite some time once they reached his new family, his stomach had gotten upset. Maddie told him it was because she was going away to school, but more importantly it was because she wanted him to work on getting to know his new family and that her being there wouldn't help that. Steven hated it, and after telling her so, he'd refused to speak anymore, grabbing his bag, and slamming the car door once he'd gotten inside it.

He's busy staring at some birds in the sky, when they pull into a parking lot.

"Is this the place, Maddie?"

"Yes, Steven."

She's got both hands on the steering wheel and they are holding on pretty tight while she looks around where they've parked. The time had gone equally faster and slower than she'd wanted, and the moment they were finding themselves had become impossibly real.

"Are you okay?"

After looking around one more time, she faces Steven. "Yes, just looking to see if they are here yet."

Steven doesn't know how he knows it, but he knows she's not telling the truth.

"Come on, let's go inside. I see a car that looks like they said would be driving, and I'm not sure how long they've been waiting."

After grabbing his backpack, he opens the door, climbs out, and walks over to take her hand. The upset he'd felt when they left the cabin has turned into nervousness.

"Do you think they will like me?"

"Of course they will, you're the child they've always wanted."

Whispering to himself as they walk toward the building, "I hope so."

Despite the fact that she probably wasn't meant to hear what he'd said, she had.

"Steven, I'll give the Harrington's a way to contact me, just in case, for emergencies."

"What's an emergency?"

"That's when something really bad happens, Steven."

She didn't explain much more though as they went to enter the building, and Steven wasn't really sure he was happy about everything, but knew that Maddie had helped him; he definitely didn't want to disappoint her. She'd gotten a funny look on her face when he told her so, but wouldn't tell him what it meant.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Next up, Meet the Harrington's!

Thanks again to everyone who's reading my story!

### **Author's Note:**

Well, Stephen is Seven, and one of the Hawkins Lab kids. I suppose this was my attempt at being clever.

This story will canon diverge somewhere in Season 2, but I'm not quite sure yet, I'm still deciding. We'll just call it an AU, and call it a day though. It's going to be a Steve/Billy story by some point; which also means I'll divert some from Billy's canon, and maybe make him a more palatable character (because that's what fanfiction is for). I'm currently working on chapter two, and I'll try to update on a regular basis if it seems like anyone is going to be interested in this (there will most likely be ebbs and flows though, full disclosure--I'm a parent and work full time).

Also, when it comes to the younger kids, I'll only write how relationships are presented on the show; anymore than that is a no go for me.